

JANUARY 21, 1993

Early quotations on wool and mohair sound like the market on premium fleeces and choice kid hair has sunk below the realm of economic reality. Coyotes and mountain lions keep production in control in our country. Australia, we read, holds billion and a half pounds of wool, making it certain that dealers the world over know a 12-digit long distance call or a 20-word fax will reserve anything from 10 pounds to a shipload on the next boat leaving port.

Stateside herders and their commission houses continue to fight in spite of the odds. Few continents in the world have been missed by delegations of U. S. sheep or goat men searching for a solution to save their product.

Now that big changes have opened the Eastern countries in Europe, an independent broker in both fibers from the Shortgrass Country has made a deal to weave rugs from mohair in Czechoslovakia.

An article in the sheep and goat herders' official journal broke the story. Whether it was a secret up to then is hard to say. The owner of the idea lives about 30 miles from our ranch house, and even though our grandparents neighbored in the old days, I don't think I made his acquaintance until 1934 or 1935.

Also, successful promoters save back Shortgrass prospects for odd times. When the millers of cubed cow feed start sacking in the early winter, selling over sixbits worth of rug cleaner at a time, much less a whole rug, or a stock certificate, is about as likely as President Clinton inviting Mr. Ross Perot to bring along a friend to the first cabinet meeting of the new administration.

On the same day the article appeared, I bought a pair of socks the Mohair council had left as a sample in a men's store in San Angelo. On Dec. 10, 1992 an audit showed me to be short 101 socks for the year. Broken down into strays lost in hotel rooms and piracy by male issues of my immediate family and a full share allotted for the laundryman to waste at his pleasure, approximately 15 pair survived to be worn only with boots.

After consulting with the manager, the clerk agreed to sell a pair of the samples for \$8. On the trade, she brought out an advertisement by the Mohair Council claiming a level of style and durability that'd make the weavers of cashmere hosiery sound like they'd be lucky to survive the first 60 days of '93 once these marvelous socks hit the market. At the same time, she also produced the story about the foreign rug venture.

Eight dollars sounds like a lot of money for clothing as perishable as socks, and it is. But she didn't realize, my youngest son is married to a lady who can turn anything from worn out burlap sacks to balls of yak hair yarn into beautiful quilts.

For Christmas she took an ancient collection of the Boss's and my old neckties and finished out a piece of work that'd hang on the front row in an art gallery. We'd never discussed socks. But I knew once these mohair ones start breaking up into singles, she and I could order up a hooking needle from Taiwan, hit the Mexican border for a maquiladora plan and make those big shot Czechoslovakian rug makers think they'd been sent back to the dugout to learn how to make lap robes.

But we need to start rolling before the idea is stolen. How big the mohair sock market develops is going to determine how many yards of rugs we hook when we have all those senoras down in Coahuila and start turning out four or five rugs a week.